POLICY
INNOVATION
LAB

Policy Advice Systems and Digital Tools in Policymaking: Kenya

September 2025

Stellenbosch
UNIVERSITY
IYUNIVESITHI
UNIVERSITEIT

School for Data Science and Computational Thinking

Contributing Researchers

RESEARCHER:

Dr Helen Macdonald

Department of Political Science, Stellenbosch University

SUPPORTED BY:

Dr Itai Makone, Dr Gray Manicom, and Prof Willem Fourie

Policy Innovation Lab

School of Data Science and Computational

Thinking Stellenbosch University

www.policyinnovationlab.sun.ac.za

Table of contents

List of Figures and Tables

Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AU	African Union
BMZ	German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development
CBK	Central Bank of Kenya
CIPIT	Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law
CSs	Cabinet Secretaries
CSO's	Civil society organizations
ETA	Electronic travel authorisation
EU	European Union
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (United Kingdom)
HLAB	High-Level Advisory Board
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GPSDD	Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data
IBM	International Business Machines Corporation
IDRC	International Development Research Centre (Canada)
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs
ITA	International Trade Administration
KANU	Kenya African National Union
KEMRI	Kenya Medical Research Institute
KODI	Kenya Open Data Initiative
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
KICTA	Kenya Information and Communication Technology Action Network
KIPPRA	Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis
KRA	Kenya Revenue Authority
KSG	Kenya School of Government
KTTF	Kenya Think Tank Forum
LLM's	Large Language Models
MDA's	Ministries, departments, agencies
MDAC's	Ministries, departments, agencies and counties

NACOSTI	National Committee for Science, Technology and Innovation
NARC	National Rainbow Coalition
NLP	Natural language processing
NSC	National Security Council
NTSA	National Transport and Safety Authority
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OGP	Open Government Partnership
PAC's	Policy advisory committees
PAS	Policy advice system
PASU	Presidential Policy and Strategy Unit
PBO	Parliamentary Budget Office
PRS	Policy and Research Services
PSC	Public Service Commission
UN SDG's	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
VDS	Vision 2030 Delivery Secretariat

Executive Summary

This report provides an analysis of Kenya's policy advisory system (PAS) and the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital tools within its government. The primary aims are to understand how the PAS works in Kenya, examine the use of AI and digital tools within the PAS, and offer recommendations applicable to South Africa's policy advice framework.

To achieve these aims, a qualitative research design based on secondary data analysis is followed. Sources include government documents, academic literature, public opinion surveys, credible news outlets, and international reports. Selection criteria focused on credibility, recency, relevance, and empirical value. While the mixed-source approach enhances reliability, the research is limited by the absence of primary stakeholder interviews –particularly within Kenya's central government – due to time constraints and ethical clearance requirements.

Historically, Kenya's policymaking was centralised and heavily reliant on external actors. However, since the adoption of the 2010 Constitution, there has been a significant shift towards a more pluralistic approach involving civil society organisations, universities, and research institutions, with increased emphasis on citizen engagement and evidence-based policy development.

Within the central government, the Presidency plays a central and influential role in setting the policy agenda, outlining priorities, and ensuring implementation. Units such as the Presidential Policy and Strategy Unit (PASU) provide direct policy advice focusing on areas like AI and digital transformation. Ministries, Departments, Agencies, and Counties (MDACs) are responsible for policy formulation input, stakeholder engagement, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Policy advisory committees (PACs) contribute knowledge and advice, although tracking them can be challenging. Various government research units focus on policy analysis, innovation, and evidence-based decision-making, often incorporating a focus on AI and digital tools. External to central government, the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) plays a crucial role in providing data-driven policy advice directly to the Presidency. KIPPRA is also involved in building policy research capacity and facilitating dialogue with think tanks.

The Kenyan government demonstrates a strong commitment to integrating AI and digital tools across various sectors. Key initiatives include the Kenya Digital Master Plan (2023) and the National AI Strategy (2025-2030). The National AI Strategy, developed using a unique participatory approach involving multiple stakeholders, outlines a broad vision for utilising AI in government functions. It highlights the importance of AI for data-driven decision-making, predictive analytics for policy outcomes, public engagement (e.g. via Natural Language Processing), and improving operational efficiency. Examples of AI/digital tool applications are seen across sectors such as tax, agriculture, security, healthcare, and transport. However, the report notes that many current applications are focused on policy output and service delivery rather than directly enhancing the policy advice process itself within central government.

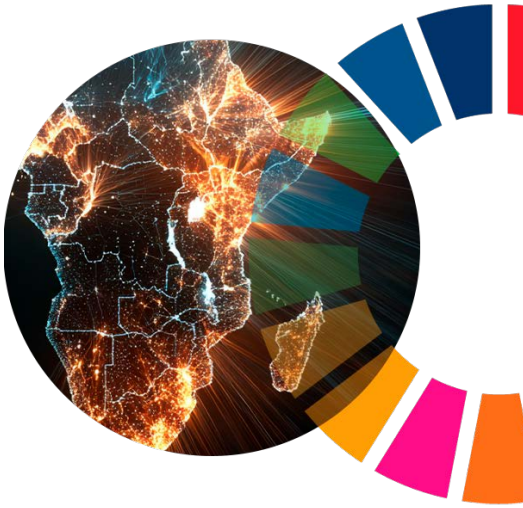
Key factors enabling the adoption of AI and digital tools in governance are strong political will, particularly from the Presidency, significant investment in digital infrastructure, and a vibrant technology ecosystem that attracts Big Tech companies and fosters public-private partnerships. The presence of individual technology and policy experts within government, for example, Ambassador Philip Thigo, is crucial in championing this agenda and building international partnerships. The strategy-first approach adopted for the National AI Strategy is noted as innovative, allowing flexibility and testing before formal policy is established.

Despite progress, Kenya faces several challenges in leveraging AI and digital tools. These include uneven digital access, with a significant portion of the population still offline; concerns about the potential misuse of data; a shortage of AI capability and digital literacy within government, public services, and low levels of citizen trust in government, which can hinder the adoption of digital services. Sustainability and sustainability and environmental impact of AI infrastructure. Kenya presents a good example of the unique difficulties facing a lower-middle income country, where inequality, unemployment, and digital access provide a challenging context to digitalisation.

Drawing on the Kenyan experience, which offers some valuable lessons, recommendations for South African policy actors include:

- Establish a **unit** similar to the Presidential and Policy Strategy Unit (PASU) that sits within the Presidency, with a **special focus on AI and digital transformation**;
- Continue to develop **strong relationships with external policy research institutions** like the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA) for example;
- Ensure that **policy advisory committees** are **small** and **effective** in order to add value to the policymaking process;
- Foster **strong political leadership** at the highest levels for digital integration;
- Consider appointing a **Minister for AI** to demonstrate political will to integrate AI and digital tools;
- Continue to develop a **National AI Strategy using a participatory approach**;
- Allow for **flexibility** and **responsiveness** when introducing new digital tools;
- Emphasise **investment** in digital infrastructure;
- Address **digital exclusion**.
- Build **AI capacity within government** in terms of skills and knowledge;
- Focus on **open data initiatives**.

KENYA



1. Introduction

This report aims to analyse the internal policy advice system (PAS) within the central government of Kenya with the following objectives:

- Understanding and analysing how the PAS works in Kenya (key entities, actors, and processes).
- Exploring if and how AI and digital tools are being utilised to enhance policy advice.
- Making recommendations to Policy and Research Services (PRS) that apply to the South African policy advice framework.

The report will consider the policymaking context in Kenya as a point of departure and then examine each objective in different sections outlined below.

2. Politics and Policy Context

Kenya is a lower-middle-income country with a population of 57 million, as of January 2025 (World Bank, 2024). According to DataReportal (2025), 30.3% of Kenyans live in urban areas, while 69.7% live in rural areas. The median age is 20, with half the population above that age and half below. Both South Africa and Kenya share similar socio-economic and governance challenges. According to the latest Afrobarometer Survey (2024-2025), Kenyan citizens blame the government for the post-pandemic struggling economy, and a majority say the country is heading in the wrong direction. Most Kenyans report experiencing shortages of basic life necessities and view health, increased cost of living, poverty, and unemployment as the most important problems facing the country. Kenyan citizens are also deeply concerned about corruption and poor service delivery.

Kenya was a British colony from the late 19th century until independence in 1963. Jomo Kenyatta became the first President in 1964, and his party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), consolidated power and silenced opposition groups. After Kenyatta's death in 1978, Daniel arap Moi assumed the presidency. Under Moi, Kenya became a de facto one-party state, and in 1982, a constitutional amendment officially made Kenya a one-party state, with KANU as the sole legal party. Growing domestic unrest and international pressure led to the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1991. Despite this, Moi retained power in the 1992 and 1997 elections, which were tainted by vote-rigging and politically motivated ethnic violence. In 2002, the opposition united under the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) led by Mwai Kibaki and defeated KANU in a landmark democratic transition. This peaceful transfer of power marked a turning point in Kenya's political history. However, the 2007 elections saw renewed violence amid allegations of electoral fraud. A power-sharing agreement was brokered by international mediators in 2008 and created a coalition government with Kibaki as President and Raila Odinga as Prime Minister. In 2010, Kenyans overwhelmingly voted in favour of a new constitution, which introduced devolution, stronger checks and balances, and an independent judiciary. This was a major milestone in the country's democratization process (Barkan, 2004; Cheeseman, 2008; Branch, 2011).

Historically, under colonialism, the policymaking process was dependent on expatriate advisers and small groups of senior civil servants (Alila & Hyden, 2021). This meant that in the decades following colonialism, there was a traditional reliance on external actors in the form of donors, international organisations, and

consultants, who all had a vested interest in the policymaking process. The outcome of this is that policies risked failure due to being generated without local knowledge. Commitment to policy implementation was also jeopardised without local interest (Alila & Hyden, 2021). Traditionally, therefore, policymaking in Kenya has been highly centralised with a top-down or elitist approach and focused on capital accumulation for the well-off to the detriment of the poor and marginalised. In recent years, however, with the rise of civil society organisations (CSOs) and the involvement of local universities and research institutes in the policymaking process, a shift has taken place with a more pluralist approach to policymaking. There has been a restructuring of institutions and legislative reforms to allow space for a variety of policy actors and public participation. This approach culminated in the adoption of the 2010 constitution, which provides a framework for citizen engagement and participatory governance.

There are a range of actors involved in the public policymaking process (see Appendix A), which are outlined in Table 1 below:

Kenya Table 1: Actors in the Kenyan public policymaking process

Government ministries, departments, agencies and counties
Cabinet / county executive committees
National and county assemblies and senate
Government research units
Judiciary
Attorney General
Citizens
Constitutional commissions and independent officers
Political parties
Think tanks, academia, research institutes
Media
Private sector institutions
Community service organisations
Council of governors
Religious organisations

Source: *Author (2025)*

The focus of this report is to highlight key entities, actors, and processes internal to the central government policy advisory system (PAS) of Kenya, and therefore discussion will largely focus on this tier of government and related actors.

3. Methodology

A qualitative research design approach is followed using the secondary analysis of data (desktop research). Data was gathered from publicly available secondary sources, including: government publications and policy documents, academic journals and books, research articles, pan-African public opinion survey, reliable news sources, international organisation reports, official websites, and digital repositories. To ensure relevance, sources were selected based on the credibility of the author or institution, recency, relevance to the research objectives, and availability of empirical data or policy insight.

This mixed-source approach promotes the reliability of findings as sources include academic, government-based, and real-world perspectives. As this research is based solely on secondary data, it may be limited by the lack of primary stakeholder perspectives and up-to-date country-specific information. It was not possible to interview key role players in the PAS within the central government of Kenya. Due to the limited time allowed for the research, it was not possible to arrange institutional ethical clearance for in-depth interviews. Organising the latter is time-consuming, and the alternative option of online interviews is not ideal as the response rate is much lower than in-person interviews.

4. Policy Actors, Entities and Processes in Kenya

Since the adoption of the 2010 Constitution in Kenya and the shift away from reliance on external actors in terms of policy formulation, there has been a move towards more evidence-based policy development. Public policymaking takes place on a national and county level and involves a broad range of actors who fulfil various roles in the process. This section will discuss the main actors, entities, and processes involved in the policymaking space. Table 2 below outlines the structure of the Kenyan Government as a point of reference.

Kenya Table 2: Structure of Kenyan Government

Executive	Office of the President (**policy initiator**) Office of the Deputy President (**policy coordinator**) Office of the Prime Cabinet Secretary Cabinet Secretaries (**technical policy development**) Cabinet Ministries
Legislative	Parliament: National Assembly + Senate
Judicial	Superior Courts + Subordinate Courts
Devolved Government	47 Counties (each with own government: county assembly + executive)

Source: *Authors (2025)*

4.1 The Presidency

The Presidency of Kenya includes the offices of the President, Deputy President, Prime Cabinet Secretary, and the Cabinet (Government of Kenya, 2023).

The President (currently President Ruto) plays a central and influential role in public policymaking, as both the Head of State and Government. Through the annual State of the Nation Address, the President sets the policy agenda and outlines key policy priorities and legislative proposals. The President chairs Cabinet meetings, where national policies are discussed and approved before being presented to Parliament. In 2023, President Ruto announced that Cabinet meetings were to be paperless with cabinet secretaries using digital tablets and notebooks (Citizen TV Kenya, 2023). The Presidency provides overall policy direction, ensures implementation, and oversees national development priorities. The President also chairs the National Security Council (NSC), influencing policies on security and defence (Office of the President of Kenya, Executive Order 1 of 2023). The Deputy President assists with the coordination and implementation of government policy across the different ministries. The Prime Cabinet Secretary assists the President and Deputy President in the coordination and supervision of government ministries and state departments and liaises with the cabinet secretaries. The latter each oversee a ministry and are responsible for drafting and implementing policies in these sectors. The Cabinet provides policy and legislation advice and approves public policies and budget estimates (Office of the President of Kenya, Executive Order 1, 2023).

While the President and Presidency play a crucial role in policymaking, Parliament, the Judiciary, and county governments provide checks and balances (in theory) to prevent excessive presidential influence. The President does have the power to agree to or reject bills that shape public policy (Monyani, 2025). If the President declines a bill, it is returned to Parliament with recommendations. For example, in January 2024, Kenya introduced a policy of visa-free entry for Africans and announced an electronic travel authorisation system, which became a bureaucratic stumbling block for many travellers, effectively creating a digital barrier to entry (Monyani, 2025). Towards the end of 2024, it became apparent that Kenya's poorly executed visa policy was impeding access to the country due to difficulties with the digital platform. Cabinet (led by the Presidency) re-evaluated the policy (December 2024) and reversed it (January 2025), which meant that all Africans were exempt from the electronic travel authorisation system (ETA) requirement. In this instance, Cabinet displayed flexibility and willingness to respond to data (African Visa Openness Index Ranking and traveller feedback), which indicated that the policy was not working (Monyani, 2025).

Within the Office of the President, the Presidential Policy and Strategy Unit (PASU) provides policy advice directly to the President. This unit's key focus areas are: AI, digital economy, digital transformation, security, and governance. PASU contributes to policy formulation by commissioning research, collaborating with other entities, focusing on government priorities, and developing evidence-based recommendations informed by diverse voices (Presidential Policy and Strategy Unit, n.d.). With devolved government and multiple stakeholders in the policy space in Kenya, this unit plays a critical role in the formulation and co-ordination of government policies, working with the various ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) (PASU and Population Council, 2021). Specific details about the internal structure of the unit and its establishment date are not publicly available, although there are reports mentioning it from 2021. The unit is also not referenced in the Public Policy Handbook of Kenya (March 2024), nor is there any information on the Presidency website.

In addition to PASU, there is another unit called the Government Delivery Unit (GDU), which falls under the rubric of the Presidency but is specifically located within the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Performance and Delivery Management. Its chief purpose is to improve the coordination of the National Government's flagship programs, monitor, evaluate, and report on the implementation of key development priorities, programmes, and projects. This unit has a website with a user-friendly interface, allowing citizens to monitor the progress of government delivery at the county level (Government Delivery Unit, 2024).

4.2 Ministries, Departments, Agencies and Counties

Ministries, through Cabinet Secretaries (CSs), develop policies under the President's guidance. Government Ministries, Departments, Agencies and Counties (MDACs) are responsible for addressing policy issues that require interventions and provide input for policy formulation. They undertake stakeholder engagement as well as policy analysis to inform decision-making. They also implement, monitor and evaluate the implementation of public policies. The State Department for Economic Planning and the State Department for Parliamentary Affairs, in particular, play key roles in co-ordinating, implementing and monitoring government policies. The State Department for Parliamentary Affairs has a policy analysis and advisory division which focusses on identifying and collaborating with relevant institutions on policy research and analysis; provides policy advice on the implementation of the national development agenda; co-ordinates and tracks policymaking in all MDAs; and monitors and evaluates the implementation of National Government policies. The division provides policy input primarily within the Executive branch but plays a strategic role in informing the Executive's engagement with the Legislative branch (State Department for Parliamentary Affairs, 2024).

The Public Policy Handbook (March 2024) is an essential tool that attempts to provide standardisation across all the different policy actors and processes which make up the complex public policymaking process in Kenya. The handbook focuses on ministries, departments, agencies, and counties who are required to use it. It is also a reference document for the private sector, development partners, and non-state actors. The Public Policy Handbook is the responsibility of the Office of the Prime Cabinet Secretary, who co-ordinates its implementation across different levels of government. The handbook does not contain any information which references the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in policy advice or the public policy process.

4.3 Advisory Committees

Government advisory committees or policy advisory committees (PACs) provide knowledge, evidence, and advice with the aim of improving the quality and legitimacy of policymaking in Kenya. Tracking these advisory committees is difficult as there is no national register of government committees nor a register of members. There are approximately 64 parastatals with a regulatory function and over 100 committees created by the government to offer policy advice. PACs are formed by ministerial directive or through specific legislation (Afro Blog, n.d.).

Some committees are created for short periods with specific objectives (for example, Competence-Based Curriculum Taskforce; Covid Taskforce), while others have a longer life (National Economics and Social Council; National Skills Development Policy Technical Committee) (Irwin & Kyande, 2023). These committees can have private sector representatives, and some are required to (for example, the Labour Migration Advisory Committee and Decent Work Committee). Most of their interaction is with the executive arm of the National Government, and reports / proposals are submitted to the cabinet secretaries. The purpose of the committees is defined by the ministry they are linked to (Irwin & Kyande, 2023; Kenya Law Reform Commission, 2025).

Business associations seek representation on these policy advisory committees and parastatal boards. At times, this is a competitive process, and at other times, the government simply appoints representatives (for example, the Kenya Private Sector Association sits on the Agriculture and Food Authority and the National Transport and Safety Authority) (Kenya Law Reform Commission, 2025). There is therefore some level of patronage with regard to the appointment of private sector representatives, but research indicates that committees are effective in the policymaking process (Irwin & Kyande, 2023). However, several recommendations have been made to improve the role of PACs in Kenya (Irwin & Kyande, 2023):

- Not every stakeholder can be involved – larger committees are less balanced and deliberative, and smaller committees are more effective.
- Government should be more transparent about its boards and PACs – a directory would make it simpler for citizens to keep track of who sits on what board and committee.
- Every board or committee should publish a publicly available annual report which focuses on impact and value, not just activity.

4.4 Research Units

The government has multiple research units operating across various MDAs that focus on policy analysis, innovation, and evidence-based decision-making. Most also seem to include a focus on AI and digital tools in their area of focus. Table 3 below lists these units and briefly describes the role that each unit plays in the policymaking environment in Kenya:

Kenya Table 3: Policy Research Units

Research Unit	Role in terms of policymaking
Research and Innovation Unit, Ministry of Information, Communication and the Digital Economy	Driving tech policy; digital transfer and innovative ecosystems. Provides data driven policy recommendations to government and supported development of the National AI Strategy.
National Committee for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI)	Promotes scientific research and tech innovation. Supports policy frameworks for AI and emerging technologies.
Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO)	Provides research and analysis on budgetary, fiscal and economic policies to guide decision making.

Central Bank of Kenya (CBK) Research Department	Provides research on monetary policy, financial regulation and macroeconomic trends.
Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS)	Collects and analyses statistical data for policy planning and national development.
Public Service Commission (PCS) Research and Policy Analysis Division	Conducts research on public sector reform and digital governance (e-government, AI-powered HR solutions).
Vision 2030 Delivery Secretariat (VDS) Research Unit	Conducts research to track implementation of Vision 2030 and focusses on digital transformation impact reports and national AI policy alignment.
Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI)	Conducts medical and public health research to inform health policy. Also focusses on AI in healthcare and digital health records.
Kenya School of Government (KSG) Research and Advisory Services	Conducts multidisciplinary, evidence-based research across the public sector and provides policy briefs to government. KSG houses the Regional Centre of Competence in Digital and AI Skilling for the Public Sector. This Centre is set to offer cutting-edge training and capacity building in digital tools and AI to the public service.

Source: *Author (2025)*

This is not an exhaustive list but provides a good overview of the scope of research units operating within the policymaking space. All these units fulfil slightly different roles in terms of policy advice, and it is not possible to discuss each one individually. However, it is useful to illustrate the link between research and policy advice using the example of the Kenya Medical Research Unit (KEMRI), as healthcare is a major concern for most Kenyans and a policy priority area. KEMRI produces policy briefs that turn research findings into actionable recommendations for policymakers. These briefs cover a range of topics, including health workforce management, health financing, and disease control strategies. Through its Policy Engagement & Knowledge Translation Unit, KEMRI actively engages in translating research evidence into policy. This involves regular interactions with policymakers to ensure that research findings are accessible and applicable to policy decisions. KEMRI organises forums that bring together researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders to discuss research needs and policy priorities (KEMRI-Wellcome Trust Research Programme, 2023).

The above discussion demonstrates the broad range of actors and multiple processes at work within the policymaking context in Kenya.

4.5 Policy Actors External to Central Government

The focus of this report is on actors, entities and processes internal to central government; however, it is necessary to discuss the role of the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA), as although it is a public institution external to central government, its primary mandate is to supply quality policy advice to the government. It was formally established in May 1997 through a Legal Notice, following a Presidential Statement issued on 14th November 1996. The institute commenced its operations in June 1999. In January 2007, the President signed the KIPPRA Bill into law, and the KIPPRA Act No. 15 of 2006 came into effect on 1st February 2007, providing a statutory framework for its operations (KIPPRA, 2022). As of May 2025, KIPPRA has been in existence for 28 years since its formal establishment.

It is primarily funded by the Government of Kenya but receives financial support from international development partners and donors for specific projects (RISA, 2022). It has a direct link to government and focuses on evidence-based research with analytical rigour. In terms of its research output, KIPPRA advises different levels of government, and its findings are disseminated through reports, workshops and direct engagement with ministries, departments and government officials (KIPPRA, 2019). KIPPRA was established (Gazette Notice of 9th May 1997) to strengthen capacity for public policy research and analysis and to offset the traditionally heavy reliance on policy proposals generated by external actors like donors, international organisations and consultants.

KIPPRA facilitates the Kenya Think Tank Forum (KTTF), founded in 2018, to bring together think tanks to strengthen dialogue with the government in the policymaking process . It holds a symposium each year to discuss current policy issues and promote the sharing of evidence. KIPPRA is of the view that universities, civil society organisations, and think tanks are still not sufficiently considered in the public policymaking process (KIPPRA, 2019).

In March 2024, KIPPRA conducted a Policy Researchers' Workshop focusing on equipping policy analysts with advanced skills, including the adoption of AI techniques. The workshop emphasised developing effective research methodologies and using AI to enhance policy research, thereby improving the quality and efficiency of policy analysis. KIPPRA has also partnered with IDinsight, a global advisory and data analytics organisation, to advance evidence-based policymaking. This collaboration involves employing data-driven approaches (including machine learning) to inform the policymaking process. The partnership focuses on joint research and evaluations in areas such as public finance management and programmes empowering women and persons with disabilities (KIPPRA, 2021).

KIPPRA has conducted research on the implications of emerging digital technologies, including AI, in various sectors. For instance, their work on cybersecurity examines the challenges and opportunities presented by AI and other technologies, providing policy recommendations to safeguard Kenya's digital infrastructure. KIPPRA plays an important role in terms of providing data-driven policy advice for policymakers and is committed to integrating AI into policy research and analysis (KIPPRA, 2021).

The 2010 Constitution heralded a new dawn for policymaking in Kenya with an emphasis on the participation of multiple local stakeholders (CSOs, local universities, and research institutes) and the shift to evidence-based policymaking. Policymaking structures in Kenya are complex and multilayered. The Presidency and units within the Presidency (PASU and the GDU) play an influential role in the PAS, but there is little publicly available information on these units. Cabinet, ministries, departments, agencies, and counties are all involved in policy formulation and implementation at various levels, guided by the Public Policy Handbook, which at this stage makes no reference to the use of AI or digital tools in the PAS. Along with multiple advisory committees and research institutes, mention must be made of KIPPRA, which is external to the central government but since 1999 has been instrumental in supplying quality, data-driven policy advice to government.

5. The Use of AI and Digital Tools to Enhance PAS within Government

Section 5 examines whether AI and digital tools are used to enhance PAS and will consider the National AI Strategy (2025-2030), the role of Big Tech and foreign actors, and the role of individual tech and policy experts. The challenges to leveraging AI in policy and governance initiatives in Kenya will be briefly discussed.

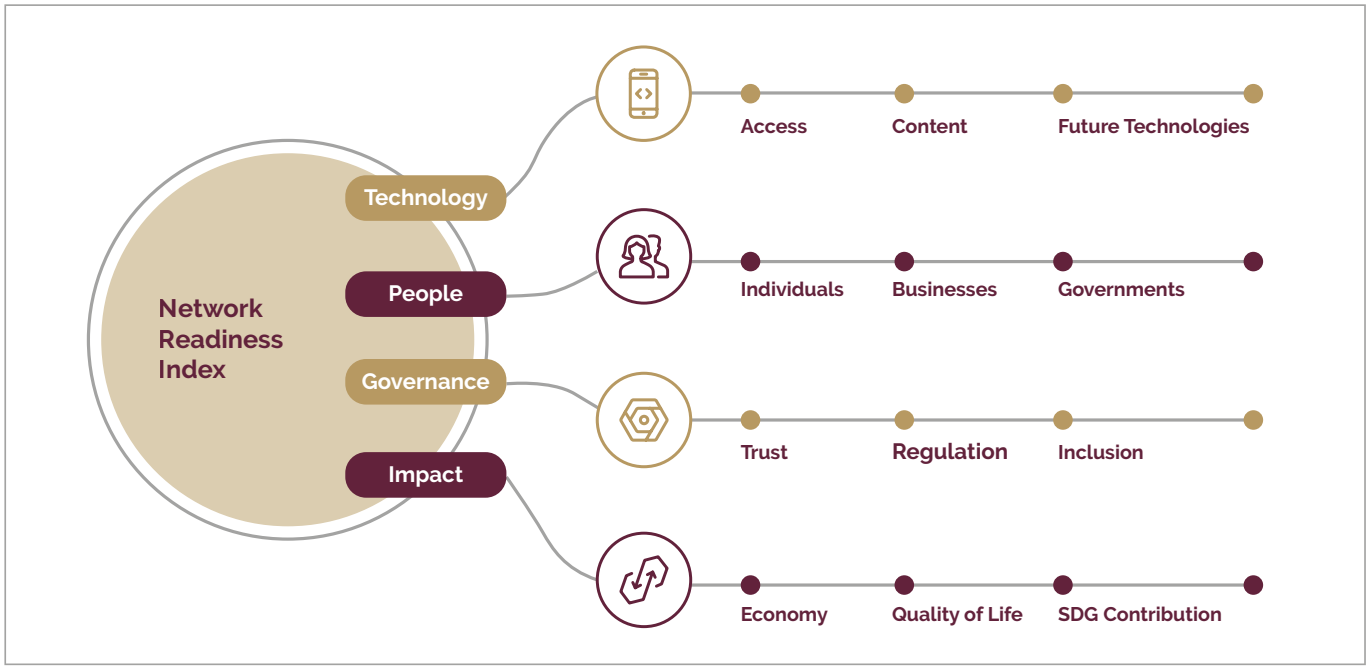
5.1 The Digital / Technology Context

Kenya has made significant progress in developing digital infrastructure with extensive investment in this area and the explosion of affordable internet services. An example of this investment is the Konza Technopolis, or "Silicon Savannah," being built by the government as a key driver of the National Development Plan (Kenya 2030). It is located 64km South of Nairobi and will house the country's data centre. It is envisaged as a smart city hub for technology, innovation, and business. Kenya is rated as "highly mature" on the World Bank GovTech Maturity Index (the index measures how countries are digitising public services). The country is known as a technology hub in Africa with the widespread use of M-PESA (mobile money) and eCitizen, which is a centralised service delivery platform for online government services (see Appendix B).

As of January 2025, approximately 27.4 million Kenyans were connected to the internet, representing an internet penetration rate of 48% of the country's population. This represents a marked increase from early 2024, when there were about 22.71 million internet users (40.8% penetration rate). Despite this growth, around 29.6 million Kenyans, or 52% of the population, are still offline as of early 2025. The expansion of mobile connectivity has been a key driver of internet access in Kenya. By early 2025, the country had 68.8 million mobile connections, exceeding the total population due to individuals using multiple SIM cards for personal and professional purposes (DataReportel, 2025; TechJournal, 2025).

According to the 2023 Network Readiness Index (NRI), Kenya ranks 70th out of 134 economies globally, making it the highest-ranked African nation in the index. Figure 1 below demonstrates the categories included in this index. Kenya's main strength is in the governance category, where it ranks 40th globally, reflecting strong digital governance frameworks (Portulans Institute, 2023). However, there is scope for development in the People category, which assesses aspects like digital skills and digital inclusion.

Kenya Figure 1: Network Readiness Index (2023)



Source: *Portulans Institute (2023)*

The Kenyan government is now actively engaging with AI to enhance the policy formulation process. In addition, it has established a robust governance framework for the responsible and ethical use of AI in various sectors, for example, agriculture, security, healthcare, education, and service delivery.

Laying the groundwork for the National AI Strategy is the Open Government Partnership (OGP) which is a global initiative launched in 2011 to bring together governments and CSO's to promote transparency, accountability and citizen participation. The 5th National Action Plan on OGP shows Kenya's commitment to open governance through various initiatives aimed at improving public service delivery, strengthening oversight and accountability, promoting citizen engagement, leveraging technology, and institutionalising open governance mechanisms.

The government is committed to improving availability of data for development and aims to make available in machine-readable format (with appropriate licensing) all data on financial resource management, implementation, planning, and monitoring of government programmes, projects, and processes to improve evidence-based policymaking (OGP, 2023: 33). Plans are underway to develop machine learning for financial inclusion and to broaden access to financial services through innovative AI applications. However, the existing Kenya Open Data Initiative (KODI) is still currently offline and has been for a number of years, despite being launched in 2011. While these initiatives reflect the government's proactive stance on broad AI integration, there is a strategic move towards leveraging AI to specifically enhance decision-making and service delivery, for example:

- AI-driven **chatbots and virtual assistants** provide automated responses for government services like tax inquiries. The Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) is planning to use AI to help reduce tax evasion and expand the tax base and has an AI-powered chatbot in place to respond to tax inquiries (Nextrade Group, 2024; Regtech Africa, 2024).
- AI-powered **NLP** tools analyse **citizen feedback** from social media, surveys, and government platforms to understand public concerns. Research is ongoing into developing solutions for local languages where chatbots can interact with these languages. Kenya is a multilingual country with over 60 languages spoken despite only two official languages (English and Kiswahili) (Ndung'u, Otieno & Mwangi, 2024).
- AI-powered systems analyse **weather patterns (drought prediction models), soil health, and crop yields**, guiding the Ministry of Agriculture in formulating food security policies and allocating resources (Toro, 2024).
- AI-powered **facial recognition** and **predictive analytics** help law enforcement agencies detect crime hotspots and improve public safety policies.
- AI is used in **cybersecurity** to prevent threats against government institutions and critical infrastructure.
- AI models analyse **health records** to track disease outbreaks (COVID-19, malaria) and support public health planning (ICAP, 2025).
- AI-driven **telemedicine platforms** guide policies on healthcare accessibility, especially in remote areas1 (World Health Expo, 2024).
- AI is used in **traffic management systems** (Nairobi's Intelligent Transport System) to reduce congestion and shape transport policies (The Star, 2025).
- AI-driven **geospatial analysis** helps in smart planning for human settlements, infrastructure development and the monitoring of water scarcity and consumption (DevAfrique, n.d.; Thigo, 2025).

1 Telemedicine is the use of telecommunication technologies such as video calls, mobile apps, and digital platforms to provide remote clinical healthcare services.

Kenya is also experimenting with the use of the blockchain, for example:[2]

- **Health:** A blockchain-based platform is being rolled out to link all 98 public hospitals in Kenya, making it easier to share and access essential patient data. It will enable sharing of treatment data between healthcare personnel in towns and rural settings which are under-resourced. A treatment scrutiny system will also be put in place to reduce incidents of wrong diagnosis.
- **Motor Vehicle Registration:** Kenya's National Transport and Safety Authority (NTSA) is implementing a blockchain-driven electronic motor vehicle identification system which will identify stolen vehicles or vehicles that are not roadworthy. The blockchain platform that will power this will also have interconnectivity with the law enforcement agencies as well as the revenue authority, immediately identifying a vehicle's status.

Whilst the country has been experimenting with various AI initiatives as highlighted above, it has also been developing a national AI strategy to drive the process of adopting AI and digital tools. The National AI Strategy document (launched on the 27th of March 2025) highlights the government's broad AI vision and emphasises the importance of AI in driving innovation and improving public services.

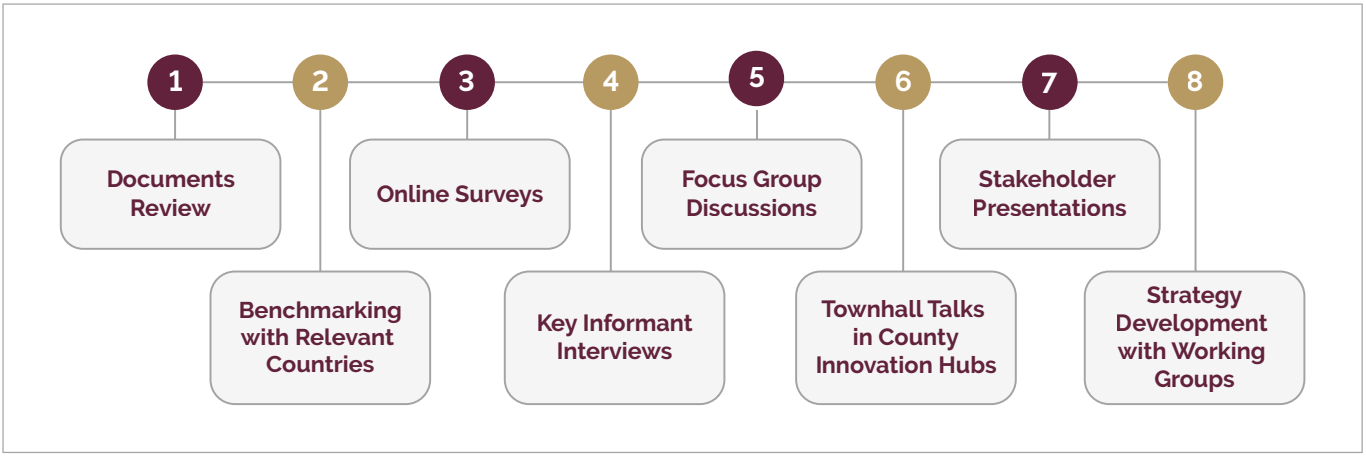
5.2 Kenya National AI Strategy

At the forefront of government's broader digitisation agenda is the Kenya Digital Master Plan (2023). It outlines strategies for digital government services, products, and data management. A key project mentioned is the digitisation of 5 billion government records. The Master Plan also emphasises the incorporation of AI-driven solutions in the deployment of government services. It aims to create a digital ecosystem where digital technologies are leveraged for economic growth and improved public services. The development of a robust legal and regulatory framework for the digital sector, including emerging technologies like AI, is also a key focus. The Master Plan includes projects like the development of an open data policy and the establishment of a government framework for the adoption and utilisation of smart technologies (including AI, IoT, Blockchain). The Plan has laid the groundwork for the National AI Strategy.

The National AI Strategy was developed using a unique participatory approach implemented by the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD) in partnership with the Ministry for Information, Communications and the Digital Economy. Multiple stakeholders were included in this process: government entities, private industry, academia, civil society, international partners, and the broader public. These stakeholders participated in several data gathering initiatives, like co-creation and stakeholder workshops; key informant interviews; focus group discussions; town hall meetings in counties; an online survey, and a public participation process to rework the final draft. This type of participatory model will hopefully build public trust in eventual AI policies and buy-in from multiple stakeholders (Mutuku, 2025). The process indicated a significant shift from the more traditional, centralised policymaking approach seen in Kenya, where policy precedes strategy and is generally top-down. Figure 2 below details the methodology of this process:

2 The OECD defines blockchain technology as a digital, distributed ledger system that acts as an open, shared, and trusted record of transactions among parties, not controlled by a central authority (OECD, 2018).

Kenya Figure 2: National AI Strategy Participatory Model



Source: *Kenya National AI Strategy, (2025,23)*

Although specific details on the direct use of AI by actors in the policy process are limited, the National AI Strategy document shows a strong national commitment to integrating AI into governmental functions and enhancing public-sector efficiency and service delivery. It is important to note that this commitment is a strategy (at this stage) and therefore a broad vision rather than actual policy, but it does indicate how policymakers in Kenya will utilise AI in decision-making, in analysing policy outcomes, in engaging with the public and in improving operational efficiency (National AI Strategy, 2025). These key aspects of the National AI Strategy are outlined below:

- Data-driven decision making – the use of AI to analyse complex datasets so that policymakers can more effectively use empirical evidence in the formulation of policy.
- Predictive analytics for policy outcome – the use of AI predictive models will assist policymakers to forecast potential outcomes of various policy options.
- Public engagement – the use of AI to more effectively communicate with citizens through natural language processing (NLP) and sentiment analysis which allows policymakers to gauge public opinion.
- Operational efficiency – the use of AI tools within government operations to streamline processes, reduce 'red tape' and improve policy formulation and service delivery.

The National AI Strategy therefore promotes the use of AI and digital tools as a means of understanding public concerns, promoting citizen engagement, and improving service delivery. It is therefore a vital strategy document that should influence both agenda-setting with the policy advice system as well as policy output.

5.3 The Role of Big Tech and Foreign Actors in Kenya

Big Tech companies play a critical role in fostering an ecosystem in Kenya where policy advice and outcomes are enhanced by innovative AI and digital tools. The Kenyan government has created an attractive environment for these companies to operate in Kenya. Most prominent amongst these are Microsoft, which opened the first Africa Development Centre in Nairobi to drive AI and Cloud solutions (for example, their AI for Good projects that support agriculture and healthcare). International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) has a research lab in Nairobi which works on AI-powered agriculture and Fintech solutions, as well as digital identification and blockchain-based governance solutions. Google (Alphabet Inc.) opened its Google Africa office in Nairobi and invests in digital skills training for thousands of Kenyans. Intel, Meta, Apple, and Amazon all have a presence in Kenya. Kenya is ideally placed in East Africa as a base for companies wanting to explore and access regional markets. It is attractive to tech companies due to its relatively advanced digital infrastructure, its youthful population, proactive government, and startup ecosystem – all these factors support the development and delivery of technology solutions in Kenya (ITA, 2023; Konza Technopolis, n.d.; National AI Strategy, 2025).

Kenya's active participation in global AI governance initiatives shows its interest in shaping international AI policies and collaborating with foreign actors. The country's involvement in networks alongside Australia, Canada, and the United States positions Kenya as a leader in advocating for inclusive and ethical AI systems. The National AI Strategy development process was also crucially supported by a number of foreign actors: the Global Participation for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD), the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and the European Union (EU) through the Digital Transformation Centre, implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO). KIPPRA also partners with IDinsight – a global data advisory and data analytics organisation (National AI Strategy, 2025).

Although external to the central government, these foreign actors and Big Tech companies play a significant role in supporting and fostering an environment for the innovative use of AI in the Kenyan policymaking space.

5.4 The Role of Individual Technology and Policy Experts

The role of individual experts within the central government of Kenya, in championing AI and digital tools to enhance the policymaking process and governance in general, needs to be noted. Joseph Mucheru (Former Minister for Information and Communication Technology, 2013-2020) is a good example. He came from a technology background, having worked as the Sub-Saharan Africa lead for Google, and was instrumental in the government's initial adoption of AI in relation to government functions during his time in office.

Currently, Ambassador Philip Thigo is the Special Envoy on Technology, Office of the President of Kenya, and a key advocate of AI Machine Learning (he is the first tech ambassador in Africa)[3]. In 2023, he was appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General to the UN High-Level Advisory Board on AI (HLAB). He was the founding director for Africa for the Thunderbird School of Global Management at Arizona State University and has previously worked in international organisations in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. He co-founded the Budget Tracking Tool and Huduma (initiatives aimed at promoting government transparency and accountability)[4]. He also co-created Uchaguzi (a platform designed to monitor elections and enhance citizen engagement) with the support of Ushahidi[5].

Ambassador Thigo works closely with President Ruto on technology-related matters, and the President himself is a strong advocate for the use of AI and digital tools in government. Both the President and the Ambassador have visited Silicon Valley (in the case of the Ambassador, multiple times) and engaged with tech executives from Apple, Google, Intel, and Microsoft, amongst others. Ambassador Thigo is the leader in Kenya's participation in the OGP, which aims to improve technology and innovation in government and partners with international organisations and the private sector in terms of AI adoption.

There is no doubt that AI innovation in policymaking requires human creativity and supervision. As Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Maria Ressa pointed out: "AI is neither artificial nor intelligent" (The Washington Post Live, 2024). Individual tech/policy experts play a critical role in Kenya's move towards harnessing AI and digital tools in the policy space and in terms of overall strategic AI development. Without critical human intervention with the necessary technological skill set and sound understanding of the policy process and unique Kenyan socio-economic and political context, this would not be possible. It would also not be possible without the political will demonstrated by the Kenyan Presidency.

---

3 In 2023, AfricaCom named him among Africa's Top 100 Most Influential Leaders in Technology and Telecommunications. In 2024, Thigo was globally recognised by Mozilla under their RISE25 Award as one of five advocates leading the development of AI ethically, inclusively, and transparently. He is also one of the World's 100 Most Influential People in Digital Government, according to Apolitical.

4 Launched in 2013 to enhance efficiency, accessibility, and transparency in government services, which have now largely shifted to online services.

5 Ushahidi is a non-profit technology company founded in Kenya that develops open-source software for crowdsourcing, data collection, and crisis mapping. It means "testimony" or "witness" in Swahili. It was founded in 2008 after Kenya's post-election violence to track and report incidents in real time and uses crowdsourced data (SMS, email, web, and social media) to map crises, disasters, and human rights violations. Uchaguzi is a Swahili word meaning "election" and is a citizen-driven election monitoring platform that allows Kenyans to report election-related incidents via SMS, social media, and web submissions.

5.5 Challenges to Leveraging AI in Policy and Governance Initiatives in Kenya

The passion for technology is not shared by everyone within government circles. Kenya is still, in many ways, a very traditional society where adoption of new technology tends to take time. Although perhaps not a relevant issue in the policy advice space, there is a widespread fear that AI applications such as robots and automated machines could lead to job losses in many sectors (CIPIT, 2022).

More relevant to the policy environment is the uneven access to digital and AI technologies. As mentioned in 5.1, as of early 2025, 52% of Kenyans are still offline (DataReportel, 2025; TechJournal, 2025). This highlights the challenge of digital exclusion for many citizens who do not have access to a smartphone or the internet. The fear that AI adoption, particularly in the form of government services, will exacerbate the rural / urban divide and marginalise poorer communities even further is very real. This would exacerbate existing inequalities in the country and pose a challenge to the government's emphasis on citizen engagement.

The potential **misuse of data** is a concern. There is opposition to the use of facial recognition technology for example, as this technology could be used for identity theft. The Central Bank head, Dr. Kamau Thugge, has voiced opposition to the use of blockchain technology in financial transactions (The East African, 2023).

There is a **shortage of AI capability in government** public services in Kenya. While there may be some individuals with expertise, a broader understanding of how to effectively use AI and its policy implications is not common amongst most government departments and public services (KICTANet, 2025). A lack of digital literacy and skills amongst government officials and civil servants will be a stumbling block to the roll-out of AI and digital tools in the policy and governance space.

There is also the increasingly important challenge of expanding the use of digital services in a **low-trust environment**. MIT Governance Lab and Busara point out in a recent report on Building Trust in Government in a Digital World that the Kenyan government faces the challenge of convincing people to engage with online services in a low trust environment. In the latest Afrobarometer data (2024-2025) 55% of citizens say they distrust the Kenyan President, while 56% say they distrust the parliament / national assembly. The more pluralist approach to policymaking in Kenya since the adoption of the 2010 Constitution is admirable, but there is still often a blur between public and private interests. Issues of integrity among public servants persist, and the government still faces significant challenges in fully upholding this constitutional principle (Alila & Hyden, 2021). Research indicates that the use of digital technology has been considered to foster public trust by improving the transparency of government data, information, or decision-making processes (Virnandes, Shen & Vlahu-Gjorgievska, 2025). Digital technology can therefore play a role in increasing confidence in the policymaking process in a low-trust environment like Kenya (and South Africa).

Notwithstanding the real issues of digital exclusion, misuse of data and low trust, **sustainability** is also a challenge as servers and data centres needed to train and run many AI tools require significant energy (water and electricity) to operate (National AI Strategy, 2025). Data centres in particular may have an environmental impact and place a strain on resources in the long term.

This is a brief but not exhaustive summary of the challenges facing the Kenyan government in the adoption of AI and digital tools. The challenges of implementing AI and digital tools in the policy space are not unique to Kenya, but many of these challenges are more difficult to overcome in a lower-middle income country where inequality, unemployment, digital access and low trust are features. This is worth noting given the relevance to the South African context, which presents similar challenges.

Kenya has made significant strides in digital infrastructure and internet connectivity, positioning itself as a leading technology hub in Africa. The government's commitment to digital transformation is reflected in its high ranking on the World Bank GovTech Maturity Index and the Network Readiness Index, although challenges remain in digital inclusion and skills development. Kenya's National AI Strategy (2025-2030), developed through a participatory process, outlines a vision for integrating AI into policy formulation, public engagement, and service delivery, with applications ranging from agriculture and health to security and transport. Big Tech companies and foreign partners play a crucial role in supporting this ecosystem, while individual technology and policy experts within government support the adoption of AI and digital tools to enhance governance and public services.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations from the Kenya Case Study

The report provides a preliminary analysis of Kenya's policy advisory system (PAS) and the role of AI and digital tools within the governance space in Kenya. Although it has not been possible to find specific reference to digital tools used within the policy advice system of the central government of Kenya, the report has highlighted the emphasis on AI and digital tools in governance initiatives and strategy generally and specifically in areas of service delivery and citizen engagement.

Kenya's policymaking is evolving and has shifted from a historically centralised, top-down approach heavily reliant on external actors to a more pluralistic model involving civil society organisations (CSOs), universities, international organisations and research institutions. The adoption of the 2010 Constitution has further emphasised citizen engagement, participatory governance and the need for evidence-based policy development.

The President and the Presidency play a central and influential role in setting the policy agenda and ensuring implementation. PASU and the Ambassador for Technology provide direct policy advice to the President, focusing on areas like AI and digital transformation. Individual technology and policy experts, along with strong political will from the Presidency, are crucial drivers in championing AI and digital tools within the policy space. KIPPRA plays an important role in Kenya in terms of upskilling policy researchers (digital literacy) and including think tanks in the policy process. It offers a range of capacity-building programmes and partnerships to enhance policymaking skills[6].

The Kenyan government demonstrates a strong commitment to integrating AI and digital tools across various sectors, underpinned by the Kenya Digital Master Plan (2023) and the National AI Strategy, and is investing a substantial amount of resources in digital infrastructure (International Trade Administration, 2024; We Are Tech Africa, 2024). These initiatives aim to improve public services, enhance data-driven decision-making, and foster a digital ecosystem. The National AI Strategy was developed using a unique participatory approach involving multiple stakeholders, indicating a shift towards more inclusive policymaking. In terms of building a digital governance ecosystem that brings together government, civil society, technologists, and academia, Kenya is highlighting the role of public-private partnership in this process. The Kenyan government is working closely with international organisations, data analytic firms, and Big Tech firms as well as the private sector in Kenya. There seems to be great merit in building an ecosystem anchored in partnership with a range of actors before putting specific policies in place.

Uniquely, the Kenya National AI Strategy followed a process that places strategy before policy. The benefits of this approach are that strategy allows for vision while policy focusses on compliance (Irura, 2025). Strategy is more flexible (AI develops faster than legislation) and allows the Kenyan government to test digital tools (for example, Agritech tools and Fintech AI) before these are sealed into set policies. The participatory approach in developing the National AI Strategy is innovative and sets a precedent for other policy areas in Kenya and for human-centred AI innovation. The strategy is crucially grounded in the unique Kenyan socio-economic context and is more effective than a top-down approach. This approach "encourages dialogue and articulation of a vision before policies formalise rules" (Irura, 2025).

AI is being explored and implemented in various areas, including data analysis for policy formulation, predictive analytics for policy outcomes, public engagement through NLP, operational efficiency in government, healthcare, agriculture, security, and transport. Kenya has made significant progress in digital infrastructure and has a relatively advanced digital ecosystem, attracting Big Tech companies and fostering innovation. The government has also actively collaborated with foreign actors and participates in global AI governance initiatives. Despite progress, Kenya faces challenges such as uneven digital access, potential misuse of data, and a shortage of AI capability within the government, which can hinder the effective leveraging of AI and digital services.

6 Additional resources for upskilling civil servants include the apolitical platform which is an online resource used by civil servants in over 160 countries.

6.1 Recommendations related to PAS for Policy Actors in South Africa

Whilst the recommendations below are based on the analysis outlined in this report, they will certainly not contain all relevant or possible implications. Keeping this in mind and drawing on the Kenyan experience, South African policy actors can consider the following recommendations:

PASU, which sits within the Presidency and provides policy advice directly to the President, has a specific focus on AI, digital economy, digital transformation, and security and governance. It could prove **beneficial to have a similar unit sitting within the South African Presidency with a similar singular focus on AI and digital transformation.**

Kenya has many policy advisory committees and research units which feed directly into the PAS. Research shows that these committees are more effective if they are smaller and South African policy actors should take note of the **benefits of smaller committees** and the need for publicly available annual reports which demonstrate value rather than just activity.

The Kenyan example of using a **participatory approach** towards developing a National AI Strategy involving government entities, private industry, academia, civil society, and international partners is a valuable model to ensure buy-in and encourage public trust. South Africa is well underway in this regard and should **continue to focus on and strengthen a collaborative approach with a broad range of stakeholders.**

Similar to Kenya's engagement with KIPPRA, think tanks, and Big Tech companies, South Africa should **continue to cultivate strong relationships with external policy research institutions, academia, and the technology sector.** These collaborations can bring valuable expertise, resources, and innovative solutions to the policy space. However, it is important to be mindful of the influence of foreign actors and ensure that policy decisions align with national interests.

Kenya has had a number of **key individuals in government who have a unique combination of both policy and technology skills and expertise**. Ambassador Philip Thigo is currently a good example of an individual working within the central government of Kenya who understands AI and its capabilities, and has the necessary networks to create international partnerships with organisations and institutions. Similar to the role of the Kenyan Presidency and individual experts like Ambassador Thigo, South Africa needs **strong political leadership** at the highest levels to support the integration of AI and digital tools into policymaking and governance. **Identifying and empowering individual experts within government who can drive this agenda forward will be key.** Both the **investment in digital infrastructure** and the **political will** are crucial in this process.

AI could also be publicised as part of **political leadership speeches**. The Kenyan President and Ambassador Thigo are examples of political leaders that openly publicise the adoption of AI in Kenya. This could be integrated into press releases, media interviews, policy forums and parliamentary debates etc. which will demonstrate the government's intention to use AI to improve government efficiency, service delivery and policy making (Dixon, 2024).

In light of the above, South Africa could **consider appointing a Minister for AI** as a separate portfolio – this would send a message to the media, international investors and business leaders that the government is committed to developing AI capacity in the country. The Minister could then also oversee the use of AI within government, encourage private investment in digital infrastructure and help increase public awareness of AI (Dixon, 2024)[7].

The poorly executed visa policy in Kenya serves as a reminder of the **importance of thorough planning and user-friendly design when implementing digital solutions as part of a policy roll-out.** It also shows how flexibility and responsiveness in policy processes are important when needing to course correct. The Kenyan Cabinet displayed the willingness to respond to data which showed that the policy was not working (Monyani, 2025). Government officials involved in policy formulation and decision-making will **need to exercise flexibility and responsiveness** particularly when digital tools are used to implement policy.

7 Currently, South Africa combines Communications and Digital Technology into one portfolio.

6.2 Recommendations related to AI and Digital Tools for Policy Actors in South Africa

The findings show that **no digital tools developed specifically for enhancing Kenya's central government PAS were identified.** The following recommendations on AI and digital tools are proposed.

Along with the emphasis on digital inclusion, South Africa should **focus on building AI capacity within government and the civil service.** This can involve investing in training programs, establishing centres of excellence similar to the KSG's Regional Centre of Competence in Digital and AI Skilling for the Public Sector in Kenya, and attracting and retaining talent with AI and data science expertise. There is a need to build the capacity of policymakers to understand both the capabilities of AI and the risks, as well as how to co-ordinate a broad range of actors working in the policy space and needing to acquaint themselves with AI-powered techniques[8].

Following Kenya's efforts with the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and its aim to make government data more accessible, South Africa should **prioritise open data initiatives** to facilitate evidence-based policymaking. Ensuring data is available in machine-readable formats with appropriate licensing is key. However, the challenges faced by Kenya's offline KODI should serve as a warning, highlighting the **need for sustained commitment and resources for such initiatives.**

South Africa should explore specific AI applications that have shown promise in Kenya, such **as AI-driven chatbots for citizen engagement, predictive analytics for policy outcome forecasting, AI in agriculture for food security policies, and AI in healthcare for disease surveillance and telemedicine.** South Africa is already using AI to advance the screening and diagnosis of Tuberculosis (Nextrade Group, 2024).

Recognising the challenge of low trust in government highlighted in the Kenyan context, South Africa needs to prioritise building citizen trust and confidence in government institutions and processes. Levels of political trust are low in South Africa – 44% of South Africans distrust the President and 46% distrust Parliament (Afrobarometer, 2022). **Implementing digital services may increase trust in government** by improving transparency, performance, efficiency and removing opportunities for bribery.

South Africa should closely monitor and learn from both the successes and challenges encountered by Kenya in its journey of integrating AI and digital tools into its policy advisory system. By considering these recommendations, South African policy actors can strategically leverage the opportunities presented by AI and digital tools to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and inclusivity of their policy advisory system, while also being mindful of the potential pitfalls and challenges highlighted in the Kenyan experience.

8 The government has introduced regulatory measures to prevent the misuse of AI technologies, particularly in relation to disinformation that could threaten democratic processes (Citizen Digital, 2025).

7. References

Afro Blog. n.d. *Composition, appointment and terms of office*. [online] Available at: https://blog.afro.co.ke/constitution/chapter-15/article-250/composition-appointment-and-terms-of-office/ (Accessed 15 Apr. 2025).

Afrobarometer. 2024-2025. Afrobarometer. 2022. *Afrobarometer Round 9: Survey in South Africa, 2024-2025*. https://www.afrobarometer.org

Afrobarometer Round 11: Survey in Kenya, 2024-2025. https://www.afrobarometer.org

Alila, P.O. and Hyden, G. 2021. Teaching public policy in Kenya: approaches and current issues. In: G. Onyango and G. Hyden, eds. *Governing Kenya: Public Policy in Theory and Practice*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 299–318.

Barkan, J.D. 2004. *Kenya after Moi*. Foreign Affairs, 83(1), pp.87–100.

Biko, J. 2025. 'Philip Thigo's journey from Kibera to global tech', *Business Daily*, 27 March. Available at: https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/bd/lifestyle/profiles/philip-thigo-s-journey-from-kibera-to-global-tech-4981496 (Accessed: 2 April 2025).

Branch, D. 2011. *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963–2011*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Burt, C. 2018. Kenyan police launch facial recognition on urban CCTV network, *Biometric Update*, 24 September. Available at: https://www.biometricupdate.com/201809/kenyan-police-launch-facial-recognition-on-urban-cctv-network (Accessed: 11 April 2025).

Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law (CIPIT). 2022. The Impact of AI on Women's Job Loss in Africa's Banking Sector. Available at: https://cipit.strathmore.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/AI-Policy-Brief-Final-Version.pdf (Accessed: 11 April 2025).

Cheeseman, N. 2008. The Kenyan elections of 2007: An introduction, Journal of Eastern African Studies, 2(2), pp.166–184.

Chege, Stanley. 2024. The Adoption of Generative AI in Kenya: A Critical Analysis of Opportunities, Challenges, and Strategic Imperatives. International Journal of Innovation and Economic Development. Volume 10: 46-57. 10.18775/ijied.1849-7551-7020.2015.102.2003.

Citizen TV Kenya. 2023. President Ruto chairs first paperless Cabinet meeting. YouTube video, 17 January. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Yr9Qq8JXWw (Accessed: 12 April 2025).

Citizen Digital. 2025. Kenya moves to regulate AI in new strategic plan. Available at: https://www.citizen.digital/tech/kenya-moves-to-regulate-ai-in-new-strategic-plan-n355979 (Accessed: 28 April 2025).

Coyle, D. 2025. 'AI can unlock productivity in public services'. *University of Cambridge*. Available at: https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/Diane-Coyle-AI-productivity-public-services (Accessed: 3 April 2025).

DataReportal. 2025. *Digital 2025: Kenya* [Online]. DataReportal. Available at: https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-kenya (Accessed: 16 April 2025).

DataReportal. 2025. *Digital 2025: South Africa*. Available at: https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-south-africa (Accessed: 29 April 2025).

DevAfrique. 2021. 'Replicable AI for Microplanning (RAMP): Transforming Geospatial Analysis with Advanced Technology', *DevAfrique*. Available at: https://devafrique.com/project/replicable-ai-for-microplanning-ramp-transforming-geospatial-analysis-with-advanced-technology/ (Accessed: 11 April 2025).

Dixon, P.2024. *How AI will change your life: a futurist's guide to a super-smart world*. London: Profile Books.

e-Citizen services, 2025. Available at: https://accounts.ecitizen.go.ke/en/ (Accessed: 13 March 2025).

Fourie, W. 2025. 'Agentic AI is changing the rules faster than policymakers can write them', *Daily Maverick*, 1 April. Available at: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2025-04-01-agentic-ai-is-changing-the-rules-faster-than-policymakers-can-write-them/ (Accessed: 2 April 2025).

Government Delivery Unit. 2024. *County Projects*. Available at: https://www.delivery.go.ke/county.php (Accessed: 20 May 2025).

Government of Kenya. *Kenya's Open Government Partnership 5th National Action Plan (OGP) 2023-2027: Embracing Open Government for a Safe, Secure, Inclusive and Sustainable Future*. Government of Kenya, 2023.

Government of Kenya. 2023. *Executive Order No. 1 of 2023: Organization of the Government of Kenya*. Available at: https://www.president.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/Executive-Order-No.-1-of-2023-Organization-of-the-Government-of-Kenya.pdf (Accessed: 11 April 2025).

IBM. 2023. *Large language models*. [online] IBM. Available at: https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/large-language-models (Accessed 8 April 2025).

ICAP. 2025. 'ICAP in Kenya Develops Digital Solution for Disease Outbreak Management', *ICAP at Columbia University*. Available at: https://icap.columbia.edu/news-events/icap-in-kenya-develops-digital-solution-for-disease-outbreak-management/ (Accessed: 11 April 2025).

Irura, M. 2025. 'Why strategy first?', *LinkedIn*, 28 March. Available at: https://www.linkedin.com/in/markirura (Accessed: 2 April 2025).

Irwin, D. and Kyande, M. 2023. Policy advisory committees in Kenya: interest group participation and effectiveness. *International Review of Public Policy*, *5*(5: 1), pp.5-25.

International Trade Administration (ITA). 2023. *Kenya - Digital Economy*. Retrieved from https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/kenya-digital-economy.

International Trade Administration (ITA). 2024. *Kenya - Information, Communications and Technology (ICT)*. Available at: https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/kenya-information-communications-and-technology-ict (Accessed: 28 April 2025).

KEMRI-Wellcome Trust Research Programme. 2023. *Policy Briefs* [Online]. Available at: https://kemri-wellcome.org/policybriefs/ (Accessed: 21 April 2025).

Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI). n.d. *Director General and Board of Members* [Online]. Available at: https://www.kemri.go.ke/director-general-and-board-of-members/ (Accessed: 21 April 2025).

Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA). 2019. *Conference proceedings on policy makers and think tanks engagement*. Available at: https://repository.kippra.or.ke/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/3723/Conference%20Proceedings%20on%20Policy%20Makers%20and%20Think%20Tanks%20Engagement%20.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (Accessed: 1 April 2025).

Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA). 2021. *KIPPRA and IDinsight to advance evidence-based policymaking in Kenya*. [online] Available at: https://kippra.or.ke/kippra-and-idinsight-to-advance-evidence-based-policymaking-in-kenya/ (Accessed: 7 April 2025).

Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA), 2022. *KIPPRA in Brief 2022*. [online] Nairobi: KIPPRA. Available at: https://repository.kippra.or.ke/items/c5938720-78da-4c91-bb24-fb3e81a3d6d9 [Accessed 27 May 2025].

Kenya Law Reform Commission. 2025. *124. Committees and standing orders*. [online] Available at: https://www.klrc.go.ke/index.php/constitution-of-kenya/126-chapter-eight-the-legislature/part-5-parliament-s-general-procedures-and-rules/292-124-committees-and-standing-orders [Accessed 15 Apr. 2025].

KICTANet. 2025. *AI in Kenya: Opportunities, Challenges, and Priorities*. Available at: https://www.kictanet.or.ke/ai-in-kenya-opportunities-challenges-and-priorities/ (Accessed: 2 May 2025).

KODI portal (Kenya Open Data Initiative) - 13 March 2025. Unable to access (sign in required).

Konza Technopolis: https://konza.go.ke/ (Accessed: 13 March 2025).

MIT Governance Lab. 2024. *Building trust in government in a digital world*. MIT Governance Lab. Available at: https://mitgovlab.org/news/building-trust-in-government-in-a-digital-world/ (Accessed: 20 March 2025).

Ministry of Information, Communications, and the Digital Economy. 2025. *Kenya Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2025–2030*. [online] Available at: https://www.ict.go.ke/sites/default/files/2025-03/Kenya%20AI%20Strategy%202025%20-%202030.pdf (Accessed: 31 March 2025).

Mitullah, W.V. 2021. The powers of agenda-setting: the role of politicians and experts. In: P. Kanyinga and J. Long, eds. *Governing Kenya: Public policy in theory and practice*. [online] Nairobi: Twaweza Communications. Available at: https://www.twawezacommunications.org/Governing-Kenya (Accessed: 6 April 2025).

Monyani, M. 2025. 'Lessons from Kenya's bold but poorly executed visa-free policy', ISS Today, 12 March. Available at: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/lessons-from-kenya-s-bold-but-poorly-executed-visa-free-policy (Accessed: 22 March 2025).

Mutuku, L. 2025. 'Yesterday, we launched Kenya's AI strategy (2025–2030)...', *LinkedIn*, 28 March. Available at: https://www.linkedin.com/in/leonidamutuku (Accessed: 2 April 2025).

Ndung'u, J., Otieno, P. and Mwangi, C. 2024. *Developing NLP Solutions for Indigenous African Languages: The Case of Kenya*, arXiv preprint arXiv:2410.09948. Available at: https://arxiv.org/abs/2410.09948 (Accessed: 11 April 2025).

Nextrade Group. (2024). AI Policy Blueprint for Africa. Commissioned by Google. Available at: https://www.nextradegroupllc.com/ai-policy-blueprint-for-africa (Accessed: 21 May 2025).

Office of the President of Kenya (n d) *President of the Republic of Kenya*. Available at: https://www.president.go.ke/ (Accessed: 11 April 2025).

Onyango, G. and Hyden, G. 2021. *Governing Kenya*. Springer International Publishing.

OECD. 2018. *Blockchains unchained: Blockchain technology and its use in the public sector*. [online] OECD Publishing. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2018/06/blockchains-unchained_fcbd568f/3c32c429-en.pdf (Accessed: 5 April 2025).

OECD. 2024. *Explanatory memorandum on the updated OECD definition of an AI system*. [online] OECD Publishing. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/explanatory-memorandum-on-the-updated-oecd-definition-of-an-ai-system_623da898-en.html (Accessed: 5 April 2025).

Pew Research Center. 2024. *8 charts on technology use around the world*. Available at: https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/02/05/8-charts-on-technology-use-around-the-world/ (Accessed: 30 March 2025).

Portulans Institute. 2023. *Network Readiness Index 2023: Kenya Country Profile*. Available at: https://download.networkreadinessindex.org/reports/countries/2023/kenya.pdf (Accessed: 11 April 2025).

Presidential Policy and Strategy Unit (PASU) n.d. *Partners*. PASU Portal. Available at: https://youthdashboard.kippra.or.ke/partners (Accessed: 20 May 2025).

Presidential Policy and Strategy Unit (Kenya) and Population Council. 2021. "Promises to Keep: Impact of COVID-19 on Adolescents in Kenya." Nairobi: Presidential Policy and Strategy Unit (Kenya) and Population Council.

RegTech Africa. 2024. 'Kenya Revenue Authority Set to Launch WhatsApp Chatbot for Tax Invoicing', *RegTech Africa*, 24 October. Available at: https://regtechafrica.com/kenya-revenue-authority-set-to-launch-whatsapp-chatbot-for-tax-invoicing/ (Accessed: 11 April 2025).

Research and Innovation Systems for Africa (RISA) Fund. 2022. *KIPPRA: Enhancing Public Service Delivery and Supporting Micro and Small Enterprises*. Available at: https://risa-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/KIPPRA-Success-Story.pdf (Accessed: 11 April 2025).

State Department for Parliamentary Affairs. 2024. *Public Policy Handbook for Kenya*. [online] Available at: https://www.parliamentaryaffairs.go.ke/sites/default/files/POLICY%20DOCUMENT%20with%20cover.pdf (Accessed: 2 April 2025).

State Department for Parliamentary Affairs. 2025. *Directorates: Policy Analysis and Advisory* [Online]. Available at: https://www.parliamentaryaffairs.go.ke/state-department-parliamentary-affairs-directorates (Accessed: 21 April 2025).

TechJournal. 2025. *Kenya's digital surge in early 2025: 68.8M mobile connections, 27.4M internet users, 15.1M social media accounts* [Online]. Available at: https://techjournal.co.ke/2025/03/04/kenyas-digital-surge-in-early-2025-68-8m-mobile-connections-27-4m-internet-users-15-1m-social-media-accounts/ (Accessed: 16 April 2025).

The East African. 2023. Alert over crypto use in money laundering, 6 September. Available at: https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/science-health/alert-over-crypto-use-in-money-laundering-4362574 (Accessed: 29 April 2025).

The Star. 2025. 'Samsung to Build Nairobi's Sh7.9bn Intelligent Traffic System', The Star, 20 March. Available at: https://www.the-star.co.ke/business/2025-03-20-samsung-to-build-nairobis-sh79bn-intelligent-traffic-system (Accessed: 11 April 2025).

Thigo, P. 2025. *Unlocking data driven development with GeoAI* [LinkedIn post], 17 April. Available at: https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7318649450397097984/ (Accessed: 17 April 2025).

Toro, A. 2024. 'OPEN: Implementing Precision Farming in Kenya', *Ubidots Blog*, 22 March. Available at: https://ubidots.com/blog/open-implementing-precision-farming-in-kenya/ (Accessed: 11 April 2025).

University of Cambridge. 2024. Diane Coyle on how AI could boost productivity in public services. [online] Available at: https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/Diane-Coyle-AI-productivity-public-services (Accessed 3 April 2025).

Virnandes, S.R., Shen, J. and Vlahu-Gjorgievska, E. 2025. Demystifying the Relationship between Digitalization of Government Services and Public Trust: A Scoping Review. *Digital Government: Research and Practice*. Available at: https://dl.acm.org/doi/pdf/10.1145/3716172 (Accessed 20 May 2025).

Washington Post Live. 2024. 'The Age of AI: Democracy on the Line with Maria Ressa', *The Washington Post*, 13 June. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/washington-post-live/2024/06/13/transcript-futurist-summit-age-ai-democracy-line-with-maria-ressa/ (Accessed: 2 April 2025).

We Are Tech Africa. 2024. *Kenya outlines $2.3Bln funding need for 2024–2027 ICT plan*. Available at: https://www.wearetech.africa/en/fils-uk/news/public-management/kenya-outlines-2-3bln-funding-need-for-2024-2027-ict-plan (Accessed: 28 April 2025).

World Bank. 2022. GovTech Maturity Index, 2022 Update: Trends in Public Sector Digital Transformation. Equitable Growth, Finance and Institutions Insight - Governance;. © Washington, DC. Available at https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/govtech/gtmi (Accessed: 20 March 2025).

World Bank. 2023. Adapting to the 4IR: Africa's Development in the Age of Automation. Washington, D.C.: World Bank. Available at: https://www.busiweek.com/files/sites/default/files/articles/adapting-to-the-4ir-africa-s-development-in-the-age-of-automation.pdf (Accessed: 13 March 2025).

World Bank. 2024. *Kenya Overview*. [online] World Bank. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kenya/overview [Accessed 15 May 2025].

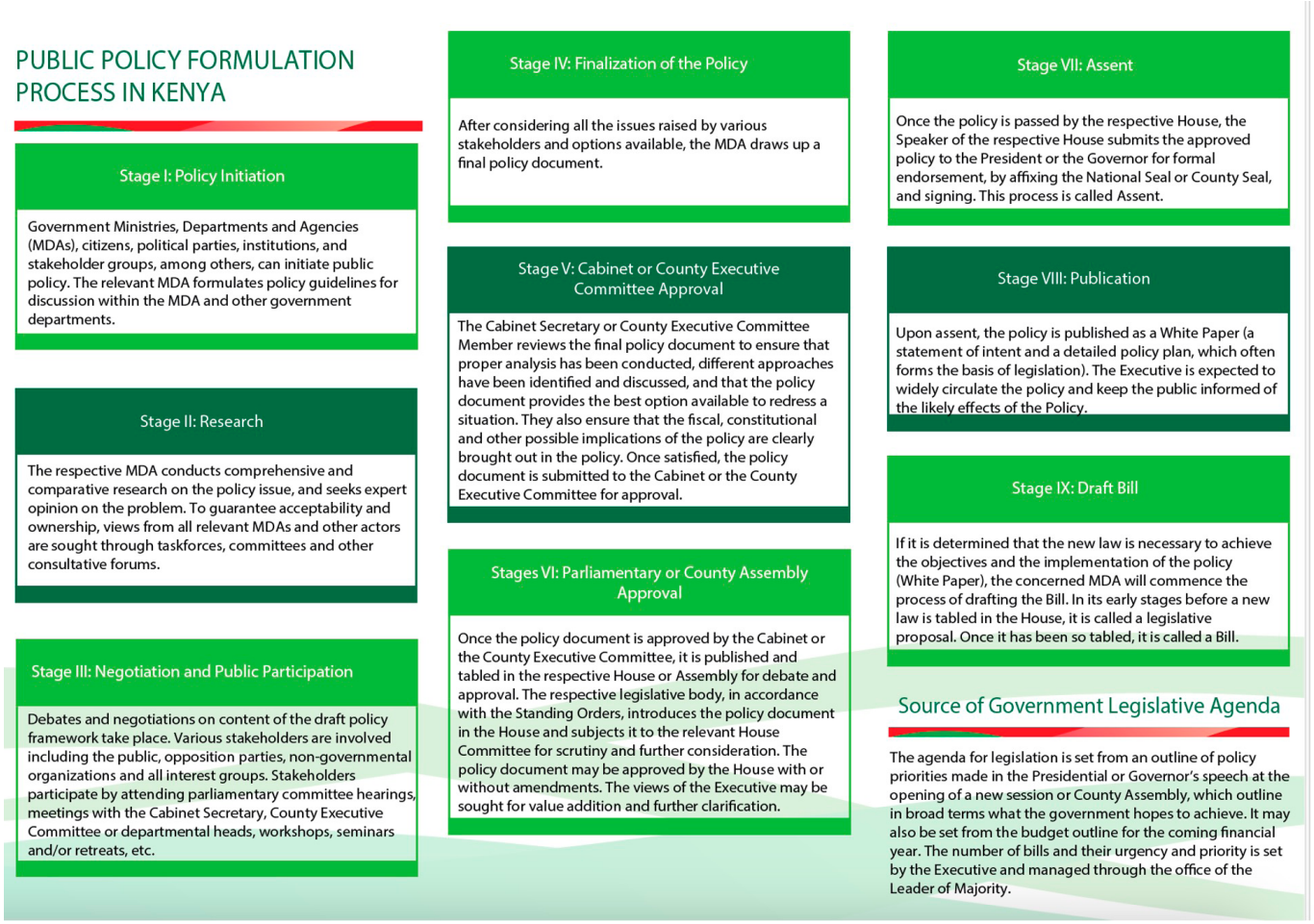
World Health Expo. (2024) 'East African Trailblazers in Telemedicine Boost Healthcare Access', *World Health Expo*. Available at: https://www.worldhealthexpo.com/insights/telemedicine/east-african-trailblazers-in-telemedicine-boost-healthcare-access (Accessed: 11 April 2025).

UN e-government Survey. 2024: https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Data-Center (Accessed: 13 March 2025).

**n.d. indicates no date available.*

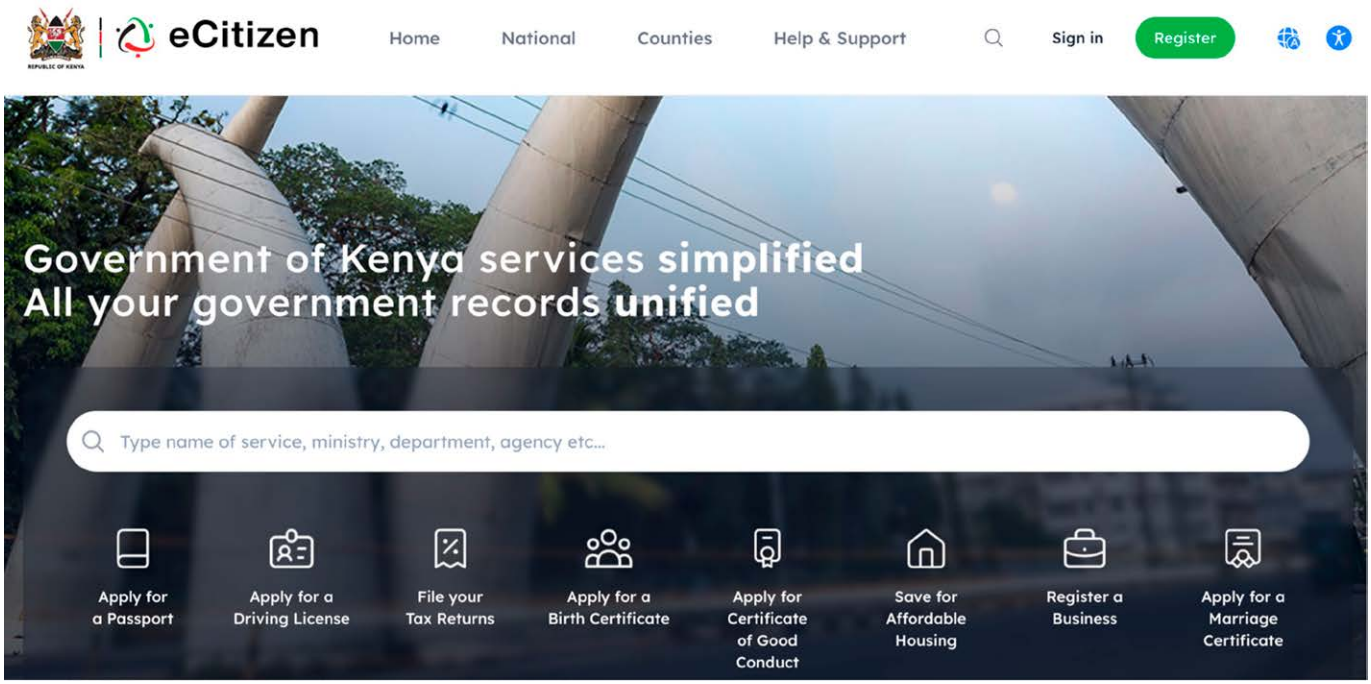
Appendices

Appendix A



Source: *KIPPRA, 2019*

Appendix B



Source: *ecitizen, 2025*

https://accounts.ecitizen.go.ke/en

Learning from Kenya's advancements in digital infrastructure, South Africa should c**ontinue to invest in expanding internet access and connectivity**. Efforts are needed to address digital exclusion in rural and marginalised communities to ensure that the benefits of AI and digital tools are inclusive and do not exacerbate existing inequalities. Currently 78.9% of South Africans have access to the internet which is a far higher degree of internet penetration than Kenya (DataReportal, 2025).